

**Written Evidence Submitted by David Simmonds CBE MP
(Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (FLO0095)**

- Following consultation with local stakeholders, it is apparent that there is a need for improved, consolidated flood reporting. I have detailed below a selection of representative feedback which I have received, highlighting the experiences, frustrations and impact in Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner.

Item 1: Stephen Heneker, Chairman, North Ruislip Flood Action Group

Ever since flooding has been an issue across the Borough, residents have been told to report all flooding incidents to Thames Water (TW):

- otherwise none of the relevant agencies would get to hear about the incidents and nothing will happen;
- funding for flood alleviation will not be allocated.

I have spoken to many neighbours in this area, who have not, and continue not to report such incidents to TW for many reasons:

- They pay their water bill to Affinity Water and are unaware of TW involvement in their area;
- The reporting process is cumbersome. If one is experiencing a flood event, the last thing most affected residents would do is think of reporting it to TW. The local authority, or perhaps the fire service seems more appropriate contacts;
- Residents who are aware of the TW reporting procedure, don't want to draw attention to local flooding, which might blight their area, particularly regarding insurance and property values;
- TW management has consistently adopted an attitude towards residents, of not taking responsibility for anything they can avoid, so that residents have little or no confidence in TW's competence, or willingness to help.

In the 21st century, in a country where extreme weather events are becoming increasingly "normal", causing flooding and other damage, a simple and comprehensive flood incident reporting system would seem essential and long overdue.

I won't regale you with some of the more absurd experiences I have had with TW, the EA and other agencies, except to say that most affected residents either give up, or don't even bother to start.

Item 2: John Scrivens, Ruislip Woods Management Advisory Group

Ian mentioned that you would be interested to hear the views of Flood Action Group members on the potential introduction of a common reporting process to notify local authority, water and environmental organisations about flooding.

I would support the idea of a common reporting process because reporting flooding incidents to multiple agencies needs to be made as easy as possible to encourage residents to do it. Clearly, making a single report is more convenient than having to make multiple reports. There is a suggestion in our area that LBH has some reports of flooding which Thames Water is unaware of. A common reporting system would ensure consistency of reporting between organisations and this should encourage co-operation as they will be working with the same information.

In addition, I would recommend that any common reporting process should:

- Be easy to use and to capture as much relevant information as possible, including where flooding does not involve properties. Thames Water's system for reporting flooding fails in this respect as it appears to deal only with specific types of flooding.
- Encourage the person reporting to take photo(s) and provide an option for them to suggest the cause of flooding and any potential solution. Residents are sometimes the only people who actually see the flood happen and, when combined with their local knowledge, this may enable them to suggest flood alleviation approaches which may not always be apparent to professionals. This approach also empowers residents to become involved in the process of flood prevention/alleviation.

On a different but related matter, there is also potential for a common reporting system for information submitted by community organisations (such as FLAGs) in flood alleviation projects. Submitting documents through a common system reduces the chance of significant information being overlooked as more eyes will see it. For example, I was recently told that Thames Water is not aware of springs under Pinn Meadows even though this local information was initially reported about a year ago and may be relevant to TW's assessment of the flooding of Brook Drive. Perhaps a common reporting system could have disseminated this information more widely.

Item 3: Stuart Hynes, Eastcote Tennis Club

Having now been flooded twice with severe financial consequences it isn't clear to us who has overall responsibility for taking ownership when we flag a potential issue arising.

The biggest risk to us appears to be the 'Joel Street Ditch'. This is a known site for cause of flooding which in our opinion doesn't appear to be being monitored appropriately. We check it regularly and when we feel it isn't being cleared as expected we communicate with the Hillingdon flooding team and the environment agency. In the last couple of months members of our club have had to take drastic action, on behalf of Hillingdon, to clear the ditch late at night as the risk of flooding to the local area has, in our opinion, become too great. Having previously reported it for several days it isn't clear who is taking responsibility

and whether they understand the severity. I would have thought that the combination of residents raising an alarm and poor weather conditions would result in immediate action but that doesn't seem to be the case.

I think there is a need for a clear reporting process but more than that we need to understand once reported who is responsible and what the proposed timescales and action is. If we ring the Environment agency, we simply get a thank you we will look into it.

Appreciate the efforts that people are making but as a club we don't feel confident yet that this won't happen again.

Item 4: Alison Holtorp, Chairman, Eastcote Residents' Association

In one of our recent meetings I believe we briefly discussed flooding in Eastcote, which has now become a regular event.

In the last 10 days there has been rain heavy enough to cause flooding on three separate occasions, 13/14th, 18th (when I recorded 14mm in what seemed like as many minutes), and 24/25th.

As you know it is very difficult to get residents to report flooding for a variety of reasons, but also because having to report via online forms to 3 separate organisations really does take a great deal of dedication. This process also allows the organisations very easily to deny/pass on their responsibility. The report has to be from the affected resident, or it doesn't get logged – a convenient way of reducing incidents! On Tuesday I attended a meeting of the Eastcote Flood Action Group and was disturbed to hear that reporting to Thames Water had been problematic and the attempt abandoned, I need to investigate more fully to see what can be done to make the process easier. One attendee asked for an aide memoire for use on future occasions as it is too much to remember from year to year. This seems like a lot of work!

Also, many of the sites require input from one or more agencies in order to address the myriad of problems which can lead to flooding. It therefore seems to me that a process for sharing reports needs to be put in place to allow all agencies to co-operate and get to the bottom of the root causes of flooding – you cannot leave residents in a situation, year after year, where every time it rains they fear that they will have to bail out their property.

I have recently been informed that there is select committee taking evidence on flooding until 28 August and apologise for responding so close to the deadline but I would be grateful if you would take this view forward.

Item 5: Claire Pitt, Flood Action Group

We desperately need a common reporting process for flooding. The current system for reporting to Thames Water requires residents to download and print a form and send this in once completed. This is an old fashioned process and the time and effort it takes means

that residents simply don't bother (or do not have sufficient IT equipment to be able to do this). TW continue to state that they will not recognise any form of flooding unless they receive a completed questionnaire - even if residents have reported the flooding to TW over the phone. I suggested to Katy Haydon that it would be more appropriate for TW to have a form that can be completed and submitted online.

Currently, residents have to inform the EA, HCC and TW all separately of a flood event and despite all of the contact details being given to them by the FLAG, it is just too complex a system. Dealing with the flood events is a multi-agency responsibility. It therefore makes completed sense for the agencies to share the information from one source and this would also make the reporting process more manageable for residents.

Item 6: Stephen Heneker, NR Flood Action Group

I would add to the excellent points made by Claire and John, that the Coronavirus situation has illustrated perfectly what happens when a reporting procedure is unsatisfactory.

That is precisely the situation with the current flood reporting system - it doesn't work.

Also, as mentioned by John, much of the evidence of a flood incident can disappear surprisingly quickly and is then lost for ever. If the evidence isn't captured immediately by residents:

- those who didn't experience it (e.g. various agencies) may have difficulty believing/understanding the full extent of the incident;
- vital evidence for working out the causes of the incident and what to do about it, is lost.

One local example of this is that the Brook Drive area has frequently flooded from surface water from the south, long before the Pinn bursts its banks (sometimes the Pinn may not overflow).

Thames Water has continued to insist that the flooding is primarily from the Pinn and not from surface water (so is not their responsibility).

TW act as judge and jury in deciding what happened, while residents continue to flood.

This cannot be allowed to continue and a proper reporting system would go a long way to help.

Item 7: Antony Bucksey, Constituent

I have been advised that you are involved with the Select Committee taking evidence on flooding and I am writing on behalf of the Eastcote Flood Action Group (FLAG), of which I am a member.

One of the problematic areas experienced by residents, and members of our Action Group, is the actual reporting of a flooding incident to the appropriate Authority, which is not always clear as the root cause of the flooding, e.g. blocked/ineffective road gullies or sewers, may not be immediately obvious.

Additionally, it may not be immediately obvious to the individual reporting a flooding which Authority should be informed, the Water Authority, the Environment Agency or the Local Authority.

Also it is unreasonable to expect the public to report one incident to more than one Authority, although it would also appear that some of the relevant Authorities do not always accept reports received via another Authority, as they are deemed 'third party' reports.

In an ideal situation, there would be a single point of contact for members of the public to report a flooding incident and this would ensure the relevant Authorities are informed. This is very like the existing emergency 999 system whereby a member of the public can summon the immediate aid of the relevant emergency service (Fire, Police or Ambulance etc) and that emergency service then informs any of the other emergency services that need to be involved or informed.

August 2020